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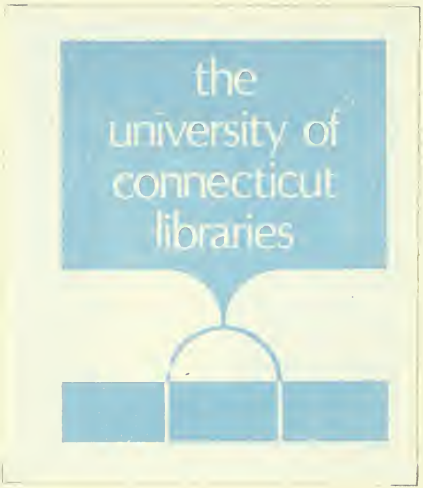

WILD FLOWERS

"Of what are you afraid, my child?" inquired the kindly teacher.
"Oh, sir! the flowers, they are wild," replied the timid creature.

PETER NEWELL'S

PICTURES AND RHYMES

NEW YORK AND LONDON
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1903

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Peter Newell

A few months over thirty-seven years ago, in a farm-house standing in some mysterious and unrevealed spot in the State of Illinois, Mr. Peter Newell made his first appearance in the world, and for the time being was a more absorbing topic of interest in his family than the Civil War then in progress. The actual date of this event, which has meant so much to the world of illustration, was March 5, 1862, the three hundred and twenty-eighth anniversary of the death of Antonio Allegri, a gentleman who, in the course of a distinguished career, made himself and his native town famous as Correggio. One who is not in the confidence of nature finds himself unable to state positively that the advent of Mr. Newell into the world on the fifth of March, 1862, was a belated effort on the part of the powers that be to make up to the world of art for the untimely decease of the great master of the sixteenth century, but the coincidence of the dates may prove suggestive to minds that find suggestions in that sort of thing. Had Mr. Newell been born a day earlier it might have changed his whole career and transformed a budding artist into a future President of the United States—

which would have been very unfortunate both for Mr. Newell and for the thousands who find in his work a constant source of delight. As a statesman he would have found admiration and encouragement from his partisans only. As an illustrator there is no division in the ranks, and he receives from all, young and old, a well-merited meed of admiration.

There was little in the early days upon the farm that gave evidence of what was in store for the young Newell, except that there was hardly any work to be done on the parental acres that seemed suited to his abilities. He was an indifferent milker; a somewhat tentative tosser of hay; and it is said that his ploughing lacked depth. However all this may be, long before the years of discretion had been reached it was quite evident to those who watched him and speculated upon his future career that in the poetry of life the bucolic cæsura was not to be Mr. Newell's division. And a little later the ease and avidity with which he seized upon the paint-pot, and the grace with which he manipulated the brush in the painting of campaign banners and the making of patent drawings, gave promise of an artistic career that must have either greatly encouraged or greatly worried those who had the care of him. It is told of an eminent sculptor that the first indications of his genius manifested themselves in the turning of a last in a shoe-shop. It is no less interesting to know that in the handling of pigments Mr. Newell's earliest experiments were on barn-doors and wagon-wheels.

His education was wholly in the public schools, and it is probably true that it was acquired with some difficulty, since Mr. Newell developed, as time went on, a certain dexterity in the caricaturing of his teachers. Many an excellent specimen of his work

in black and white has been rubbed hastily from a school black-board by an irate teacher; and it is a cause of positive grief to certain collectors of his pictures to think of the ruthless wet thumb that obliterated Mr. Newell's slate impressions of those who were trying to teach him something he never knew before. Yet the artist acknowledges that the personal criticism that was laid on at such times by his unconscious models has done him much good from the point of view of morals, if not from that of his art. Discipline is not usually taught in art-schools, but out of his art tendencies Mr. Newell acquired a knowledge of the power of authority which has helped to make of him a good citizen.

In the early eighties Mr. Newell began to turn his knack at caricature to some account, and for a year or two was one of the most acceptable "idea-mongers" in the periodical world. Rough sketches of quaint and humorous pictures he thought ought to be made, with an accompanying text elucidating the composition, were submitted by the hundreds to editors in the effete East, and met at their hands with so ready an appreciation that, in 1883, their clever author found himself financially able to desert the pleasant paths of quietness and peace, to which he could never grow accustomed, for the turmoil of a great city, the storm-centre of which, to one of his tastes, lay in the Art Students' League, then doing business in a combustible building in Twenty-third Street, New York, well provided with fire-escapes, however, which taught by practical methods a "skied" artist how to get down to the line of safety and success. At the League Mr. Newell drew blockheads and other models assiduously for three months, and after having been convinced that his work was utterly hopeless, and that he had no future

either ahead of him or behind him, felt that the time had come to launch himself upon the sea of art. He knew that utter hopelessness had been from the beginning a sign of genius, and his own hopelessness was so extremely utter that it gave him confidence. The rest needs no statement here. From the moment that Mr. Newell began reducing his own ideas to concrete form his work has been very much in the public eye; and it is the fact to-day that, had he been twins instead of a single individual, both of him would find it difficult to meet the demand for his delicious pictures and quaint fancy with an adequate supply.

The key-note of his success has been his absolute fidelity to his own Muse. He cleaves only unto her, and has never flirted with the muse of another. His work is his own, and is not modelled after or in any sense suggestive of the work of any other, past or present. What he has learned in his art he has discovered for himself. With no desire to disparage the good work that is done in the Art League, one may say that even the teachings of that institution have not spoiled him. Had he not successfully forgotten what he learned there he would have become conventional, and if he had become conventional he would not have become unique. He is conscious of no "influence." He has admired the work of the Japanese, and has studied with care the technique of the French flat-tonists; but the technical side of his work is self-acquired, and he is consequently more confident in his touch than he would be had he been merely taught. And the same is true of his writing. The note of quaintness which dominates in his productions is quite as clearly struck in the little rhymes that he has put forth from time to time as in the pictures with which he illustrates them. He had not read

or even seen the famous Nonsense book of Edward Lear when I asked him the impertinent questions necessary for the production of this paper in June last. And it is his sturdy adherence to his own point of view that has made him *sui generis*.

Mr. Newell's favorite diversions are tennis and chess. His interests outside of his art lie in a Sunday-school, of which he is superintendent, and in Public Health, which is more than ever his concern since he is a member of the Health Board in the New Jersey community of which he is an honored citizen. When I asked him about his reading, he observed quietly that he was fond of it; and his favorite authors, he said, were Bulwer and myself, which placed him *en rapport* with me at once, although I have latterly found Bulwer more difficult than he appeared to me to be twenty years ago.

The spirit of the man is that of one who enjoys himself. No pessimistic note sounds in his organization; there is no pose of self-deprecation; and he communicates his happiness to those who read his rhymes and who look upon his pictures. All the sunshine of his life—and there seems to be a great store of it—he shares with all who will partake, and if he has any troubles he keeps them to himself. He is essentially a humorist, and one of the highest type. It is his mission to bring laughter into the world, and he succeeds beyond measure, and always cleanly, clearly, humanly. He reminds one of Thackeray's implied definition of humor when in description of Dickens he speaks of "that mixture of love and wit—humor, tender humor."

John Kendrick Bangs.

Yonkers, N.Y., August 24, 1899.

A WILD MARCH HAIR

"Oh, what is that, my Ethelbert—that creature writhing there?"
"Why, it must be, sweet Dorothy, methinks, the wild March hair!"

A BORROWED VOICE

"That flowers have a language is a fact I've noted long;
But I must say I never knew their voices were so strong."

RIPPLES

"Whene'er into the lake I shoot, though careless be my aim,
I always hit," declared Towhit, "the bull's-eye just the same."

PLAID RABBITS

I have a pair of bunnies, and their eyes are large and sad;
The coats are white as buttermilk, and also somewhat plaid."

A VICIOUS GOAT

"I do not love my billy-goat, I wish that he were dead,
Because he kicked me, so he did—he kicked me with his head."

TIMID HORTENSE

"Now if the fish will only bite, we'll have some royal fun."
"And do fish bite? The horrid things! Indeed, I'll not catch one!"

A MATTER OF DIRECTION

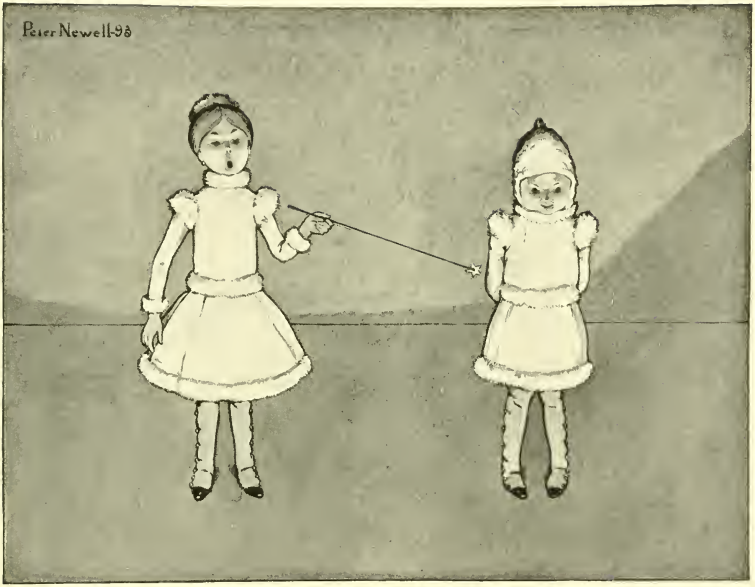
A little boy met, on his way to school,
A savage old bear in the forest cool.
"Which way is he going?" growled Bruin, aside.
"The same way as you, sir," the laddie replied.

AN INTERESTING SITUATION

"Dear aunt, the kitty chased a mouse—the naughty little witch—
And it ran up a curl, it did, and I can't tell you which."

A GENERAL PRICKING SENSATION

"To ruthlessly destroy a home where countless bees do dwell
Doth prick my conscience," quoth Hoban, "and cuticle as well."



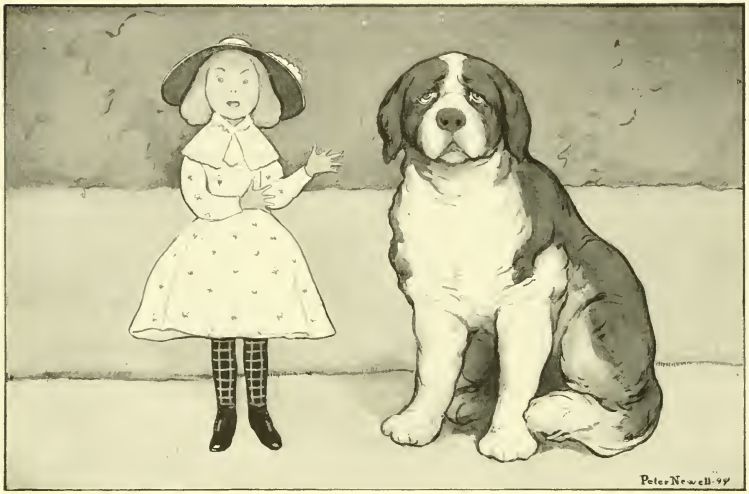
A CHRISTMAS ALLEGORY

Spake Phœbe Jones, in clearest tones, "Permit me, sir, and madam—
I represent a Christmas Eve, and Will a Christmas Adam."

AN UNREASONABLE COMPLAINT

"Whew! but it's awful hot for June!" exclaimed the lamb, aglow.

"You haven't taken off," said Charles, "your woollens yet, you know."



AN UNSAINTLY DOG

"My doggie is a Saint Bernard," said Bertha, small and quaint;
"But he's too ill-behaved, I think, to be a really saint."

THE GARDENER'S NAUGHTY SON

"Oh, little maiden, pretty maiden, you had better have a care;
A great big tiger-lily is a-bloomin' 'round in there!"

ELLEN AND HER LAMB

"When shearing-time is come, my lamb, and shearers clip and pull,
I'll take you to the barber's, dear, and have him cut your wool."

A PROPER SELECTION

A bat was caught out in a storm, and very badly fared;
So an umbrella-man he sought, and had himself repaired.

A SUGGESTIVE DISTINCTION

"Now can you tell me, little lass, where lives Polander Rouse?"
"He isn't living anywhere—he's boarding at our house."

A NEW-YEAR ANECDOTE

From Fox's *Book of Martyrs*, Aunt Matilda slowly read.
"O aunt, turn over a new leaf," her youthful nephew said.

THE SOILED GOWN

GRANNY. "Why, now I think you've got some ink upon your gown so fair."

NANNY. "Oh, then I fear I've passed too near a fountain pen somewhere."

AN ENTRANCING SPOT

"What sweet influence is there here
That I should pause in passing?
My frame with rapture thrills! I fear
To part will be harassing."

THE BROKEN PANE

"Who broke this pane? I'd know his name!" the angry master cried.
"It must have been a shooting-star," these clever rogues replied.

YE COURAGEOUS HUNTER

With bow and dart ye hunter bold, within a quiet vale,
All carpeted with dazzling white, doth strike an awesome trail.

AN INKY NIGHT

The tempest whistled through the trees, the night was inky black,
When Winfred stumbled through the door, in dreadful plight, alack!

A FUNNY SIGHT

"The white that's on my Towser is so very, very white,
That when we walk out on the snow it makes a funny sight."

AN ELECTRICAL SERPENT

Within the deep, dank woods he stole through
shadows dark and grim,
When, like a streak of lightning, sir, a serpent
made for him!

A HERO

In times of need, when dogs of war do strain and break their bonds,
At the first call to arms, our dear Algernon boy responds!

THE LITTLE RABBIT'S MISTAKE

"Hello, some rabbit's lost its tail! Too bad,
I do declare!"
(He saw a fluffy thistle-down afloat up in
the air.)

A WARNING

When Valen-time is come, beware, ye maiden and ye swain,
And Cupid, bold, invades the land, with ammunition train.

A YOUNG PHILOSOPHER

"My eyes are very much alike, as you can plainly see,
And act in perfect harmony, and never disagree.
When to the right I turn one eye, the other turns also,
And when I turn one to the left, so must the other go.
And when I wink with one eye, then the other wants to wink.
Oh, they are very much alike, my two eyes,
Don't you think?"

FOURTH-OF-JULY NOISES

"Say, Dollie, did your ear detect that cannon cracker's roar.
I 'spect it's wrecked a house and lot, and, maybe, somethin' more!"

THE CUTEST GAL IN TOWN

"I don't just like the polka-dots, Belinda, on your gown."
"All right, sir," and she shook her skirts—the cutest gal in town.

HER POLKA DOTS

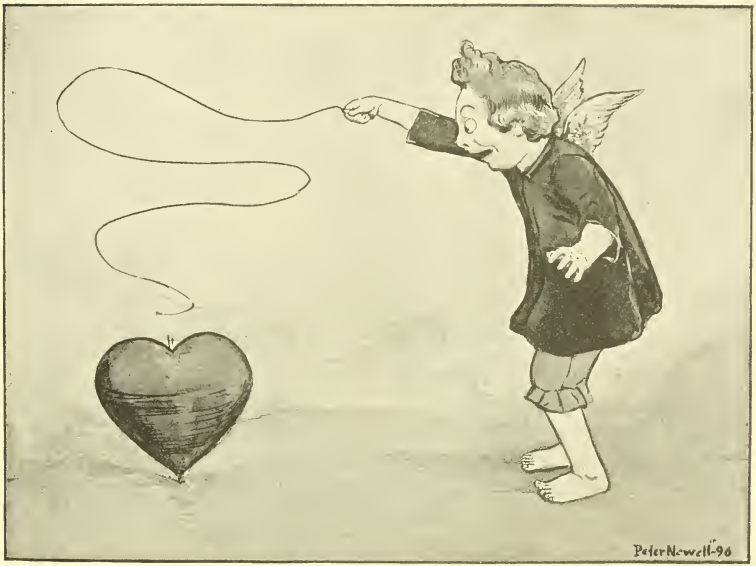
She played upon her music-box a fancy air by chance,
And straightway all her polka dots began a lively dance.

AN ATTRACTIVE BONNET

With fingers deft sweet Mabel wove of flowers gay a bonnet,
When all the honey-bees about did straightway settle on it.

PARENTAL CARES

"Oh, talk about your cutting teeth! It isn't half as bad
As cutting horns! Be quiet, child, you'll drive your father mad!"

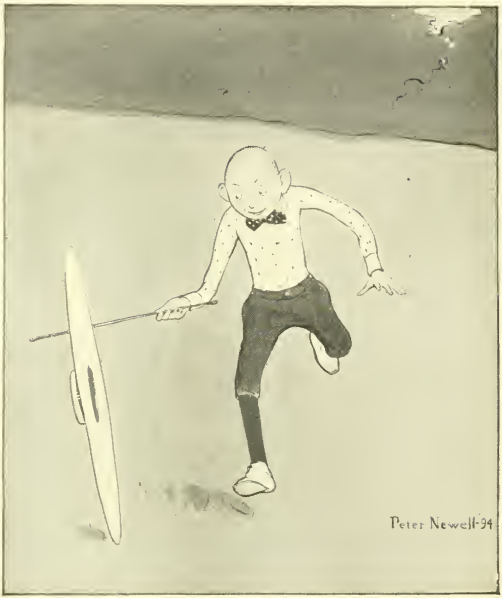


CUPID'S TOP

"Spin, spin, my sweetheart; spin as though you'd never stop.
The spider it may spin it's web, but I will spin my top."

The Minstrel.

He seized some strands of vagrant hair
Betwixt his finger and his thumb,
And then a wild Æolian air
Across the vibrant chords did thrum.



A CLEVER LAD

Instead of buying James a hoop with which to have some fun,
His father bought for him a hat to shield him from the sun!

A CAREFUL MOTHER

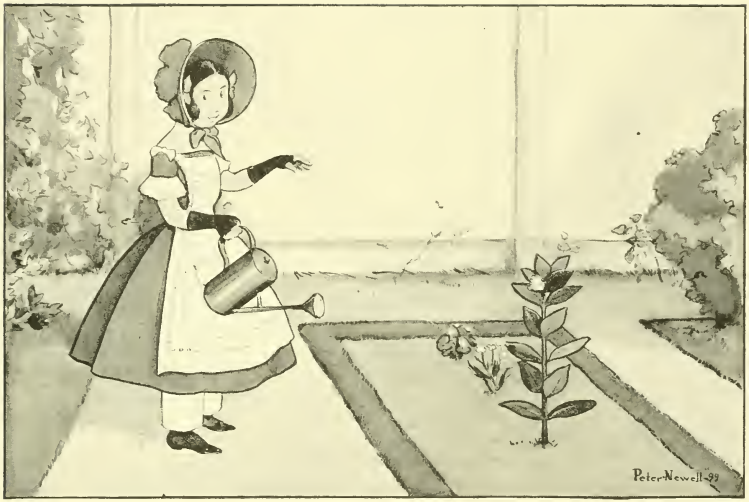
"Good-morning, Mistress Nanny Goat,
The kids quite well appear."
"The *kids*, sir? I would have you note
I'll have no slang in here."

SALLIE MURMURED NOT

Delance met Sallie on the bridge, and kissed her on the spot;
The brooklet murmured down below, but Sallie murmured not.

SLOVENLY CARLO

"You sloven, Carlo, sit up straight and look me in the eye!
Now, since you wear a collar, sir, why don't you wear a tie?"



HER DAIRY

"A milkweed, and a buttercup, and cowslip," said sweet Mary,
"Are growing in my garden-plot, and this I call my dairy."

MILD BELINDA

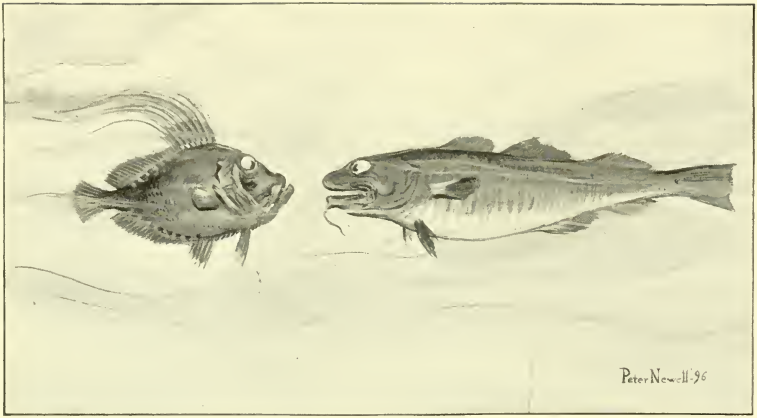
Belinda Beadle was so mild, the wild March hare, in love,
Came out and licked her dainty hand, and spoiled a new kid glove.

PEEVISH CHARLES

"I wonder why it is," said Charles, "and, oh, I wonder why,
That birds delight to always sing, and never, never cry!"

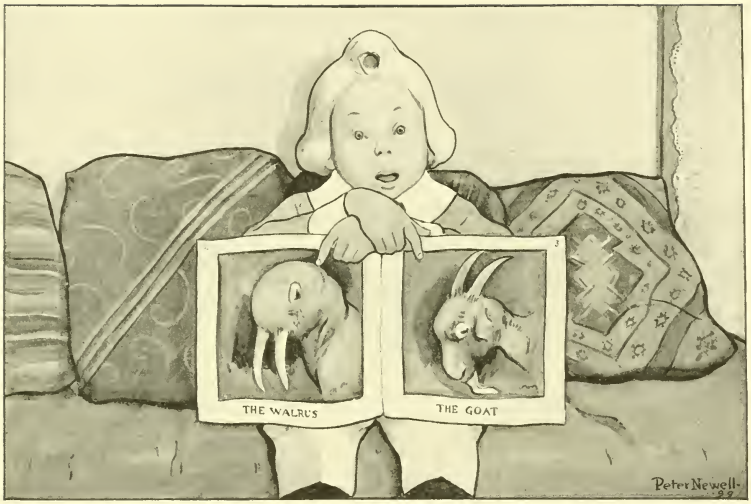
GOODLY ADVICE AND TIMELY

Little maidens, young and tender, if you needs must go
Where suspended from the ceiling is a mistletoe,
This remember, this remember: never, never fail
To retire your comely features in the meshes of a veil.



NOT HE

"My friend, did you ever a Fish Ball attend?" a Dory inquired of a Cod-
fish refined.
That fish made reply, in a manner quite dry, "I never mix up in affairs
of that kind."



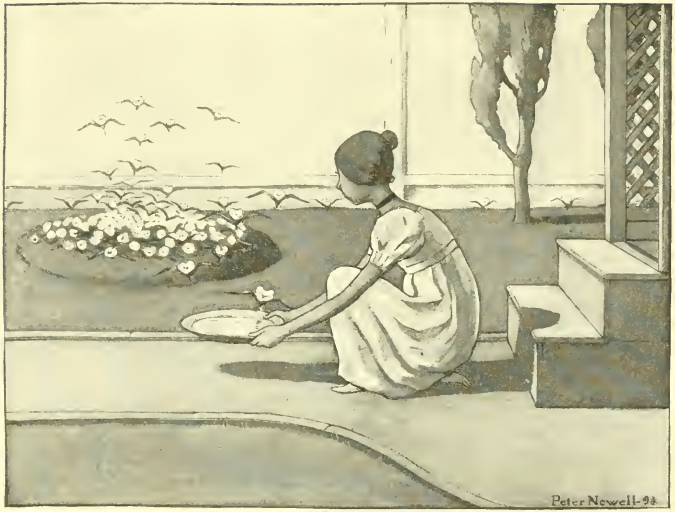
EDGAR AND HIS NEW PICTURE-BOOK

The Walrus hath two great teeth growing from its mouth and down.
The Goat hath two teeth quite as large that start up from its crown.

A CONFESSION

"Oh, what have you done with your little straw hat, with the streamers of ribbons so gay?"

"Oh, mother! quite hungry was I, and I ate my straw hat, I am sorry to say."



WATERING THE FLOWERS

There is no sight that gladdens more the drowsy summer hours
Than Susy Ann, with brimming pan, awatering her flowers.

WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY IN THE SCHOOL-ROOM

"Ef George had been a girl, and had dressed
in female clo'es,
Would he have been the mother of her country, do you s'pose?"

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